

NO THIRD RETURN TO THE LAND OF ISRAEL

From Study in Ezekiel
by Willis E. Bishop

Ezekiel 11:17: Therefore, say, "Thus says the Lord God, 'I will gather you from the peoples and assemble you from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel, and they will come there, and they will take away all its detestable things and all its abominations from it. And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them and take the stony heart out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them. And they shall be My people and I will be their God.'"

Here is a promise of restoration. "I will gather you from the peoples and assemble you from the countries." A word about returns to the land. Sometimes I think that is misunderstood. It is often said that there are three dispersions and three regatherings of Israel. I do not count it that way.

Jacob and his sons went down to Egypt where from seventy they grew into millions over the period of four hundred thirty years. Then Moses led them out, organized them into a nation at Sinai, and under Joshua they entered the land. That is frequently spoken of as the first return. But that was not a return. They were not a nation when Jacob and his sons went down to Egypt, so I do not count that as a return.

Then there came the Assyrian and Babylonian captivity, two phases of one captivity. In Ezekiel we are dealing with the Babylonian captivity. They come back from that with representatives of all twelve tribes in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, so that is the first return. That return was developed into the nation that was present in the time of our Lord. After the time of our Lord, in 70 A.D. and following, they were driven out again and ceased to be a nation. Then in 1948 Ben Gurion stood and announced Israel as a nation back into the land. That was the second return. That return from all over the world has been a thrilling story. They are back in the land for the second time. So the question is, "What is going to happen now?" Many feel Israel will be driven out again and brought back again a third time by the Lord. But I don't think that is what the scripture teaches.

Isaiah 11:11: And it shall come to pass in that day, the Lord shall set His hand again a second time [emphasis mine] to recover the remnant of His people who remain, from Assyria and Egypt, from Pathros and Cush, from Elam and Shinar, from Hamath and the islands of the sea.

I don't find anywhere in scripture where it is said that Israel will be returned to the land a third time. They are back in the land for a second time, and regardless of the difficulties they will go through, I am firmly convinced they will never be driven out again. They are

in the land and will stay there until the Lord comes and sets things right. Ezekiel is prophesying a part of that second return. Some of it, as far as we are concerned, is still in the future. Let me read some of the conditions.

Ezekiel 11:19: And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them and take the stony heart out of their flesh that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them. And they shall be My people and I will be their God.

In evaluating those two verses, I don't think that, spiritually, that has yet happened to Israel. Part of what Ezekiel is prophesying lies in the future. But there is a wonderful promise. In answer to Ezekiel's question in verse 13, "Will You make a complete end of the remnant of Israel?" the Lord says, "No, there will come a very blessed time when they will know Me. I will be their God and they will be My people."

Q. They will be brought back by the angels then, won't they?

A. Yes, in Matthew 24:31 we are told that when the Lord comes all the way to the earth He will send His angels who will gather them back into the land. So the restoration will not be complete until the end of the Great Tribulation period.

Q. Re coming as dry bones.

A. The reference is in Ezekiel chapter 37 where the dry bones come together as a nation but there is no spirit in them. I think we are in the process of seeing Ezekiel 37 being fulfilled right now. God will take out their stony heart and put His Spirit within them. He will be their God and they will be His people. Israel has a very difficult time ahead and then a blessed time.

Q. What about this when Russia comes down on horses? How do you explain that?

A. You are speaking about Ezekiel 38 and 39. Eventually we'll get there in our study, but that will happen and there will be a tremendous slaughter, according to those two chapters, so that it will take seven months-plus of continued employment to bury all the dead. But the Lord will intervene and save Israel again from complete destruction.

Q. Then Russia will no longer be a major power.

A. It is growing back into one right now and will indeed be a threat. I am sure Russia is involved in Ezekiel 38 and 39 because it states the "uttermost parts of the North" [literal] (38:6; 39:2). And from Israel the uttermost parts of the North is Russia.

Q. They have all the modern equipment and yet they are coming down on horses?

- A. It isn't generally known, but Russia has a tremendous build-up of cavalry. In Ezekiel 38 and 39 there is a description of the burning of weapons that will be used. There are fearsome, awesome days ahead according to Ezekiel 37-39.
- Q. If the Lord treated the apple of His eye, Israel, as He did, what is He going to do with us?
- A. What is He going to do to the United States? I think as we read through Ezekiel and see all the sin, we could almost insert U.S.A., couldn't we. I don't know what the Lord is going to do. He will judge, that's for sure. I am not sure that the United States will disappear altogether, though some prophesy it that way. The scripture mentions that the nations say, "Have you come to take a spoil?" (38:13). No particular nation is named, but the U.S. will probably be a (weak?) part of the United Nations. I do not know.
- Q. Several persons have mentioned that the United States is going to have a mighty revival, with England too.
- A. It is possible. I wouldn't say that is out of the question, because we have a problem pinpointing the exact time for the Lord's return, and I don't want to do that. I don't think we can. However, Paul does warn us in II Timothy 3 that the last days will be fierce, and the Lord asks whether there will be any faith on the earth when He comes (Luke 18:8). Even though there may be great revivals, and I hope there will be, yet in the end there will be a complete turning away from the Lord.

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